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Don Quixote: The demonstration of a UCC in the project Green Urban Distribution in Oslo

The project Green urban distribution in Oslo is a running research and development (R&D) project owned by the City of Oslo and run by researchers at SINTEF. The project has a wide consortium consisting of representatives from the various parts in the logistics chain. The aim of the project is to develop new ways of handling goods in the inner city of Oslo in order to improve efficiency and environmental quality.

An important part of the project has been to demonstrate the new possibilities for urban freight. Much of the conducted work has had a focus on identifying state of the art techniques and suggesting which solutions might fit best the current situation in Oslo. After much research from SINTEF a list of options was presented to the project consortium in August 2013. The consortium suggested to try the urban consolidation centre (UCC) as the demonstration.

The City of Oslos role

In the R&D project, there are many work packages conducted by SINTEF. However, the realization of the demonstration project was the City of Oslos responsibility. In the course of the autumn of 2013 the municipality of Oslo began the work leading up to the establishment of a temporary consolidation centre. Many of the reactions from involved actors and stakeholders were centered around the lack of time for thorough planning, risk for the participants involved, and a short demonstration period discouraging possible participants from adjusting their routines only to change them back again. The establishment of the consolidation centre became, at least in the short term, a Don Quixotes quest for a better urban environment.

Nevertheless, the quest goes on. The time-frame of the R&D Green Urban Distribution in Oslo is almost over, but the urban distribution still faces the same challenges. The mandate of the City of Oslo to facilitate urban logistics and encourage liveable urban development remains. The prospect of a city centre with improved air quality, reduced noise levels, improved traffic safety and reduced emissions of greenhouse gases is heavily dependent on efforts made within urban logistics planning.

Lessons from the attempt of making a short term UCC on a short notice

Although we failed to establish a test for a UCC in the autumn of 2013, there are many lessons that we take with us for the work towards another attempt. Here, our tale diverts from that of Don Quixote in the sense that the UCC is possible to realise, and that it can take practical concerns into

account. The primary lessons from attempting to achieve this within a three month trial period on short notice is:

1. The time spent planning for and establishing a three month trial is approximately the same as needed for a permanent UCC. This implies that we have the potential for a greater impact on the urban environment and greater benefit from the cost if the project when it is established with the intent of a permanent UCC.
2. The stakeholders need to know all the terms for the UCC. This means that the model for the type of UCC that we want must be clarified in advance, as well as details on available services, contract periods and costs.
3. The field of logistics is complicated and the actors are very loyal to one another. We have experienced that the receivers of the goods rarely, if ever, control the means of transport. The transporters, however, deliver on the terms of the dispatchers selling the goods. The involvement of the whole logistics chain is necessary to find good solutions. Also, the prospect of having the UCC as the registered address for the goods makes it easy to work across a vast range of dispatchers.

There are of course many more lessons from our work, and these will be brought in to improve the solutions for a UCC in the future.

On the path to an Urban Consolidation Centre

Over the past months we have made some of the necessary steps towards establishing a UCC in Oslo. We are working on a strategy for a 50% reduction of pollution and greenhouse gases from urban logistics where the establishment of a UCC is central. As well we have initiated the cooperation towards the goal of a UCC with to central groups of stakeholders; the consortium in the project Green Urban Distribution in Oslo; and the Business Network that is a semi-formal group of business partners and public bodies. The Business Network has been partly functioning as a Freight Quality Partnership (FQP). Our next step is to establish an exclusive FQP so that the focus in the meetings can be on freight and logistics alone, and not other unrelated issues.